FRANCIS MASSON, A GARDENER-BOTANIST WHO COLLECTED AT THE CAPE

By MIA C. KARSTEN

(With Plates XXXVI and XXXVII)

I. BIOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT

A history of the botanical exploration of the Cape during the period 1772 up to 1795, but particularly the years 1772–75, in which the Swedes CARL PETER THUNBERG and ANDERS SPARRMAN, whom we have already dealt with in this Journal, are outstanding personalities, would certainly fall short if no tribute were paid to their contemporary FRANCIS MASSON for his valuable contributions towards the knowledge of Cape botany, and for introducing numerous species of Cape plants into European gardens. We may well call that period the era of THUNBERG, SPARRMAN and MASSON.

Unlike THUNBERG and SPARRMAN, MASSON could not pride himself on an academical education. A man of simple birth, he has had but little opportunity of developing his natural gifts, at least in his youth. But during the years of his extensive travelling and collecting MASSON undoubtedly mastered a fair knowledge of botany and, as FORBES[1] puts it, "attained a position where he was held in esteem, and probably in friendship, by men of learning who had been more fortunate in birth and education than he".

GEORGE FORSTER,[2] however, at first showed but little appreciation for MASSON'S achievements, obviously looked down upon him. In his introduction to the German edition (1784)[3] of SPARRMAN'S *Voyage to the Cape*, etc., he mentions that aboard the same ship (the *Resolution*), which took him (and his father) on a voyage round the world, was "a Scots garden-hand named Masson". And he cannot help hinting at MASSON'S lack of education by asserting that the report of his travels at the Cape had been cleansed of its errors in spelling before publication by his patrons in Philosophical Transactions. Judging by what he writes about it, FORSTER did not think much of MASSON's report: "I have not yet come across a translation [into German] of this poor product, and if all our publishers who are only too eager to print almost anything,[4] really had rejected it, then this would fully establish its value for our public, so that we need not waste words over it". After this he grudgingly admits that "only for the natural philosopher does it contain a few useful indications, in so far as one can rely on the honesty of the author in things which are not above his comprehension". Later on, however, in his letter to BANKS of January 30, 1786, which one will find included in this paper, FORSTER appears to have changed his opinion of MASSON much to the better.

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[1] V. S. FORBES, *Masson's Travels*, S.A. Geogr. Journ., Vol. XXIX, April, 1947, p. 18.

[2] J. G. A. (GEORGE) FORSTER and his father J. R. FORSTER, German naturalists. See this Journal, Vol. XXIII, April, 1957, p. 47. Being German, the younger FORSTER'S name should actually be spelled GEORG.

[3] ANDREAS SPARRMANS, *Reise nach dem Vorgebirge der guten Hoffnung, den südlichen Polarländern und um die Welt, hauptsächlich in den Ländern der Hottentotten und Kaffern in den Jahren* 1772 *bis* 1776. Translated from the original Swedish (*Resa till Goda Hopps-Udden, Södra Pol-kretsen Och Omkring Jordklotet*, etc.—Stockholm, 1783–1802) by C. H. GROSSKURD. Edited and provided with an introduction by GEORG FORSTER.—Berlin, 1784.

In the custody of the library of the University of Uppsala, there are the originals of three letters MASSON wrote to THUNBERG. These were published in this Journal as part of our paper on THUNBERG,[5] but as they cover MASSON's second sojourn at the Cape, of which no report has been written, we think it justified to include them also in this biographical account. They are of interest not only because of the valuable additional information they provide, but also for the spelling-mistakes they contain, which gives credence to FORSTER's statement.

As we shall see later, MASSON was on friendly terms with THUNBERG, the Father of Cape Botany. In his letters and other writings MASSON clearly shows his respect for Doctor THUNBERG, whom he accompanied on two of his journeys into the interior of the Cape. But it was the great LINNAEUS whom he worshipped above all. He took an obvious delight in his correspondence with the Archiater.

Little is known about his relations with SPARRMAN. MASSON arrived at the Cape on October 30, 1772, as much as 6½ months after SPARRMAN who, at the time of MASSON's arrival, had not yet returned from his journey to the Paarl. They apparently had not the opportunity of seeing one another before SPARRMAN set out on his long voyage to the Antarctic and round the world as assistant to the FORSTERS on November 22. We did not come across any reference to such meeting, neither in MASSON's nor in SPARRMAN's writings. When SPARRMAN returned to the Cape in March 1775, MASSON was still there and then they met as revealed by their letters. But nothing is known of any collecting trip on the Peninsula made together.

MASSON undoubtedly was a more sturdy character than SPARRMAN. Unlike the latter he was a man of quiet disposition who, as may be gathered from his writings, believed in a more simple mode of life. He was less ambitious than SPARRMAN and not so keen on gathering money. But he acquitted himself of his task as a plant-collector with utmost zeal, in spite of the fact that the stipend which could be obtained for him was hardly adequate. His work meant everything to him. SPARRMAN took it altogether easier. With reference to SPARRMAN'S letters to THUNBERG and LINNAEUS, one of our correspondents made the remark that SPARRMAN always seemed to make excuses for doing nothing.

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[4] Free translation of the German "schreibseligen Fabriken", which literally means "factories with passion for writing".

[5] This Journal, Vol. V, January, 1939, pp. 23–26.

MASSON has shown himself a gifted draughtsman—a most useful talent for a natural historian and traveller, especially in a time when there was no such thing as a camera.

The best and most comprehensive published account of MASSON'S life and work is undoubtedly that by Sir JAMES EDWARD SMITH[6] in *Rees's Cyclopaedia* (1819), which may be reproduced here for the greater part.

"FRANCIS MASSON, a name which ranks very high among those who, by encountering personal difficulties and hardships, with the most indefatigable and disinterested zeal, have promoted botanical knowledge, was born at Aberdeen in August 1741. Whether he was originally educated as a gardener, or at what time he found his way to London, we are not informed. It appears that, having been for some time known to the late excellent superintendent of the Royal Garden at Kew, Mr. AITON,[7] and probably employed under him there, he was fixed upon as a fit person to undertake some botanical expedition, for the purpose of enriching that collection, when the return of the celebrated BANKS and SOLANDER[8] from their voyage round the world, gave a popularity and a stimulus to every exertion in favour of natural science. We believe the establishment of a travelling botanist in the king's service, if not suggested by the first-mentioned of these eminent men, was planned entirely under his advice and direction. In 1771 or 1772, Mr. MASSON was dispatched to the Cape of Good Hope. That country had been, for near a century, celebrated as a mine of botanical riches, which had scarcely reached our gardens but through the medium of those of Holland. The works of HERMANN, COMMELIN, BURMANN, BREYNIUS,[9] and others, had sufficiently evinced the abundance of these treasures; but comparatively few of them had been procured in a living state, or cultivated with success, even by the Dutch themselves; and of those but a very small portion had, from the time of the first Earl of Portland,[10] when he came over with king William, to our days, come into general cultivation in England. The writer of this well recollects the pleasure which the novel sight of an African Geranium [*Pelargonium* !], in Yorkshire and Norfolk, gave him about forty years ago. Now every garret and cottage-window is filled with numerous species of that beautiful tribe, and every greenhouse glows with the innumerable bulbous plants and splendid heaths of the Cape. For all these we are principally indebted to Mr. Masson, besides a multitude of rarities, more difficult of preservation or propagation, confined to the more curious collections. Many of these perhaps have only survived to bloom once or twice within the walls to which they were first consigned; to be defined and named by the skill of a Solander, a Dryander,[11] or of the younger Linnaeus in his transient visit among us,[12] and have then disappeared. Such has unavoidably

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[6] Sir JAMES EDWARD SMITH, physician and botanist, born in Norwich in 1759, was the son of a wealthy non-conformist wool merchant. In 1781 he was sent to the University of Edinburgh to study medicine. Here he attended the lectures in botany given by Dr. JOHN HOPE, one of the earliest teachers of the Linnean system. In September, 1783 he came to London to study under JOHN HUNTER and Dr. W. PITCAIRN, with a letter of introduction from Dr. HOPE to Sir JOSEPH BANKS. On the death of the younger LINNAEUS in 1783, the whole of the library, manuscripts, herbarium and other natural history collections made by LINNAEUS father and son, were offered by LINNAEUS'S widow to BANKS for a thousand guineas. BANKS declined the offer, but on his recommendation SMITH purchased the collections which ultimately arrived in October, 1784. The total cost, including freight, was £1,088. It is stated (*Memoir and Corresp. of Sir J. E. Smith*, edited by Lady SMITH, i, 126) that GUSTAVUS III of Sweden, who had been absent in France, hearing of the dispatch of the collections, vainly sent a belated vessel to the Sound to intercept the ship which carried them. The collections were originally housed in SMITH'S apartments in Chelsea. After a continental tour (1786–87) SMITH left Chelsea in order to practise medicine in London. He took a house in Great Marlborough Street, to which the collections were removed. The year 1788 saw the foundation of the Linnean Society of London. SMITH was one of the founders and the Society's first president.

From 1788 SMITH gave lectures at his own home in botany and zoology, later on he became a lecturer in botany at Guy's Hospital. From 1800 he contributed botanical articles to *Rees's Cyclopaedia.* In 1796 he retired to his native city, Norwich, only coming to London two or three months in each year to deliver his annual course of lectures at the Royal Institution. In 1814, when the Prince Regent (GEORGE AUGUSTUS FREDERICK, afterwards KING GEORGE IV) became patron of the Linnean Society, SMITH received the honour of knighthood. As his most important work should be mentioned the *Flora Britannica*, in three 8vo vols., 1800–1804. He died in Norwich in 1828.

The above records have been taken from the biographical account of SMITH by G. S. BOULGER in *Dictionary of National Biography* (1898). We may add that the Linnean collections, including abt. 15,000 plants and abt. 3,000 letters, are now housed in Burlington House, Piccadilly, the Linnean Society's present seat.

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[7] WILLIAM AITON (1731–1793), botanist, was born in Lanarkshire in Scotland and brought up as a gardener. In 1754 he came to London in search of employment, and was engaged as an assistant by PHILIP MILLER, then gardener to the Botanic Garden at Chelsea. In 1759 he was appointed to the management of the Botanic Garden at Kew, which was then in the possession of the Princess Dowager of Wales (i.e. Princess AUGUSTA, widow of FREDERICK LOUIS, Prince of Wales, son of GEORGE II). He soon raised the position of the garden to one of importance. He took every opportunity of increasing the collections, and it certainly was at his suggestion that MASSON was sent out to the Cape as a botanical collector. In 1783 he was promoted to the management of the forcing and pleasure gardens at Kew and Richmond, at the same time retaining his former post, a house being built for him at Kew by GEORGE III. In 1789 he published the *Hortus Kewensis, being a Catalogue of the plants cultivated in the Royal Garden at Kew*, in 3 vols., 8vo, with 13 plates. An important work, containing an enumeration of no less than 5,600 species, to which he devoted, using his own words, "a large proportion of the leisure allowed by the daily duties of his station during more than sixteen years." A second edition, in 5 vols., appeared in 1810–13, edited by his eldest son, WILLIAM TOWNSEND (1766–1849), botanist. AITON received the assistance of Dr. SOLANDER, then curator of Sir JOSEPH BANKS's herbarium, to whom the plants from Kew, as well as from other important gardens were sent to be named. He was also helped by DRYANDER. The *Hortus Kewensis* is of historical value on account of the care with which the dates of the introduction of the plants enumerated were ascertained by AITON, not only from books, but also from personal inquiry among his contemporaries. His eldest son succeeded him. This biographical account we owe to JAMES BRITTEN (*Dictionary of National Biography*, 1885).

[8] DANIEL SOLANDER, see this Journal, Vol. XXIII, Oct., 1957, p. 136.

[9] PAUL HERMANN (HERMANNUS), *Horti Academici Lugduni-Batavi Catalogus*, etc. (1687), containing small engravings of as many as 34 Cape plants; *Paradisus Batavus, innumeris exoticis curiosis herbis* (1698), published posthumously, with many illustrations, including a few Cape plants.—HERMANN, a physician and professor of botany at Leyden University, was born at Halle in Saxony in 1646 and died at Leyden in 1695. At the expense of the province of Holland he made a journey to the East Indies and Ceylon from 1672–1680, with the usual stop at the Cape. LINNAEUS's *Flora Zeylanica* (1747) is based on HERMANN's collections.

JAN COMMELIN, *Horti Medici Amstelodamensis Rariorum . . . Plantarum . . . Descriptio et Icones* (1697–1701): a posthumous work in 2 vols., containing coloured pictures of many Cape plants, continued by his nephew CASPAR COMMELIN (see below) and published by FRANÇOIS KIGGELAER and F. RUYSCH.—JAN (JOHANNES)

Commelin or Commelijn (1629–1692), an apothecary and merchant at Amsterdam, became a botanist of distinction. In 1690 he was appointed "director-practicus" of the Hortus Medicus (the later Hortus Botanicus of Amsterdam University). He is the author of several botanical publications, of which the above-mentioned work is the best known.

Caspar Commelin, *Praeludia Botanica ad Publicas Plantarum Exoticarum Demonstrationes* (1703), and *Horti Medici Amstelaedamensis Plantae Rariores et Exoticae* (1706), a further continuation of the work started by his uncle. Both works, which are illustrated, contain some pictures of Cape plants.—C. Commelin (1667–1731), studied botany at Amsterdam, was appointed botanist of the Hortus Medicus in 1796 and professor of botany at Amsterdam in 1706.

Jan Burman, *Decades Rariorum Africanarum Plantarum* (1738–39), containing 100 excellent pictures of South African plants.—Burman (1707–1779) was a professor of botany at the Athenaeum Illustre (the later University) at Amsterdam. See also this Journal, Vol. V, January, 1939, p. 4, and Vol. XXIII, April, 1957, p. 57 (footnote 22).

Jacobi Breynii Gedanensis Exoticarum aliarumque minus cognitarum Plantarum, Centuria Prima, etc. (1678); a fine folio printed on paper almost as thick as cardboard and in magnificent type, containing descriptions and figures of no less than 48 well-marked Cape plants.—Jakob Breyne (1637–1697), better known under the latinized name of Breynius, was a wealthy merchant of Dantzig, known for his interest in natural history. He is the author of a few botanical works of which the one mentioned above is the most outstanding.

[10] It was in 1688 that William Bentinck, first earl of Portland, came over from Holland with Prince William III of Orange Nassau, Stadtholder of Holland, who was to ascend the English throne as King William III in the spring of 1689.

[11] Jonas Dryander (1748–1810), born in Sweden, was a pupil of Linnaeus. Later on he came to settle in London where he succeeded Solander as librarian to Banks in 1782. He also became librarian of the Linnean Society. See also this Journal, Vol V, October, 1939, p. 154.

[12] Linnaeus *fil.* was travelling abroad during the years 1781 and 1782. He first went to England: his ship sailed from Gothenburg on April 27, 1781. He stayed in London for 18 months and left for a visit to Paris at the end of August, 1782. From there he passed through the Netherlands (where he met the younger Burman), visited Hamburg and Copenhagen, and ultimately returned to Uppsala at the end of 1782.

been the case with many of the Orchis tribe [Orchidaceae], for want of our knowledge of their requisite treatment; while many of the *Liliacei* [!] have flowered on their arrival, but though their bulbs have continued to exist, they have seemed rather to languish than to flourish, for want of their native arid soil and burning sun. Such deficiencies and disappointments indeed were scarcely felt while Mr. MASSON continued at the Cape, so abundant and repeated were his supplies. The Dutch appear not to have restrained his inquiries and acquisitions. He was allowed to travel many hundreds of miles up the country, and we have often heard him recount his adventures. At length, his harvest having been judged, for the present, sufficiently abundant, he was, in 1776, ordered to explore the Canary Islands, the Azores, Madeira, and part of the West Indies, especially the island of St. Christopher. In this mission he employed about five years more, and returned to England in 1781.

During his stay at the Cape, he entered into correspondence with the great LINNAEUS. Having discovered a bulbous plant of a new genus, he was not only laudably ambitious of botanical commemoration in its name, but he was particularly anxious, as appears by one of his letters, to receive this honour from no less a hand than that of his illustrious and venerable correspondent. This indeed was the "*unicum premium*", the only reward to which he aspired for all his labours. That he sought no pecuniary advancement, the extreme slenderness of the stipend which could be obtained for him, and his disregard of such objects at all times, abundantly evinced. He obtained the honour to which he aspired. The specimen of *Massonia* in the herbarium of LINNAEUS, named by his own trembling hand near the close of his life, proves that the name had his sanction, though it appears from the *Supplementum Plantarum*, p. 27,[13] to have been originally suggested by THUNBERG, in whose company MASSON botanized for two years at the Cape. This justice rendered to the merits of our botanical traveller, was finally crowned by the publication of plates of two species of *Massonia*, in the *Hortus Kewensis* of his friend AITON, a book which he had so eminently contributed to enrich, by his discoveries in various parts of the world. Before that book appeared however in 1789, he had, in 1783, visited Portugal and Madeira, and had returned to the Cape of Good Hope in 1786. He now combined experience and foresight with zeal and activity. He was prepared to take advantage of different seasons—in some to collect specimens, in others roots and seeds—so as best to make up for former deficiencies or losses; and he had already made himself acquainted with the various situations, or tracts of country, most promising for every purpose. In consequence of this knowledge, it was settled, in consultation with his able adviser, sir

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[13] LINNAEUS *fil.*, *Supplementum Plantarum Systematis Vegetabilium*, etc. (1781).

JOSEPH BANKS, that his travels should now be restrained to within forty miles of the Cape town. That space of country was found to be as yet unexhausted, and almost perhaps inexhaustible, as to what it might afford for our gardens, and the expense as well as labour of the undertaking was, by this plan, greatly lessened.

Mr. MASSON returned to England again in 1795, and spent two years there among his botanical friends, seeing the produce of his exertions every day blooming around him, at Kew and at Hammersmith, his residence at Kensington placing him within reach of the principal botanic gardens, as well as at a moderate distance from the great theatre of scientific and literary information in Soho Square.[14]

A life of so much leisure soon became irksome to a man who had been used to so much bodily exertion, and mental recreation, amid the wild and novel scenes of nature, and he solicited another mission. This was obtained from his royal master, at the recommendation of his former friend and patron [Sir JOHN PRINGLE[15]]; and he was sent to explore such parts of North America, under the British Government, as appeared most likely to produce new and valuable plants. This was truly a national project, worthy of those who planned it; the vegetable productions of that country, from the hardiness of their constitution, being not merely objects of curiosity, taste or luxury, but capable of being naturalized among us, for the probable benefit of our arts, our domestic and rural economy, our kitchen gardens and farms, as well as of our shrubberies and parterres. The success of our traveller was equal to the expectations that had been formed. New plants, of interesting characters and properties, sprang up under his steps, and it seemed probable that much practical knowledge was likely to result from his discoveries, even through the experience and converse of the wild inhabitants of those little explored regions. So others have found who have followed Mr. MASSON; for he survived not to reap or to communicate more than a foretaste of these advantages. He died about Christmas, 1805, in the sixty-fifth year of his age, at Montreal, in Canada. What little property he left, fell into the hands of two of his nephews, and consisted chiefly of the journals of his various travels, drawings, and collections of dried plants and other natural productions. Some of these relics have been purchased by the present Mr. LEE,[16] of Hammersmith, a worthy friend of their original possessor.

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[14] Sir JAMES SMITH refers here to BANKS's house in Soho Square, the gathering-place of science.

[15] For Sir JOHN PRINGLE see Part II of this paper: the short address preceding MASSON's *Account of three Journeys . . . into the Southern Parts of Africa*, with footnote 37 giving some biographical data, and also the BANKS Memorandum.

[16] JAMES LEE the younger, MASSON's friend at Hammersmith, a nurseryman like his father, was a less known personality than the latter. The elder JAMES LEE (1715–1795), who entered in partnership with LEWIS KENNEDY as nurserymen at

From him, or from our own personal knowledge, most of the above particulars are derived; the dates only being taken from the short mention of our deceased friend, communicated by the present Mr. AITON to SIMS and KONIG'S[17] Annals of Botany, v. 2, 592".

So far Sir JAMES, who concludes his article with a quotation from a letter he received from the younger LEE (see below), and a few notes about MASSON'S work *Stapeliae Novae*, to which we will return later.

With reference to the preceding, it should be added that the Royal Garden at Kew where MASSON obtained employment, in those days was not a government institution as it is to-day, but a private royal domain, "the pleasure garden of '*Farmer George*' and his wife Charlotte", as MACOWAN puts it.[18]

The author seems to be uncertain as to the year MASSON was sent to the Cape for the first time. This definitely was in 1772.

Sir JAMES EDWARD SMITH'S article in *Rees's Cyclopaedia* is followed by the description of the genus *Massonia* and of 8 species known at the time, viz.: (1) *M. latifolia*, L. f., Broad-leaved M.; (2) *M. muricata*, Ker, Prickly-leaved M.; (3) M. scabra, Andr. (=*M. pustulata*, Jacq.), Shagreen-leaved M.; (4) *M. echinata*, L. f., Rough-leaved M.; (5) *M. pauciflora*, Ait., Few-flowered M.; (6) M. angustifolia, L. f. (=*Polyxena angustifolia*, Baker), Narrow-upright-leaved M.; (7) M. undulata, Willd. ex Kunth (=*P. marginata*, Baker), Waved-leaved M.; and (8) M. ensifolia, Ker (=*P. pygmaea*, Kunth), Trumpet-flowered M. Although there is no indication as to the authorship of these descriptions, we may well attribute them to SMITH.

We now come to a number of letters in the SMITH Correspondence, written by and about MASSON and including the two letters referred to and quoted from by Sir JAMES.

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the Vineyard, Hammersmith, in 1760, was a correspondent of LINNAEUS. He translated part of LINNAEUS'S works into English, under the title of "Introduction to the Science of Botany". This was the first description of the sexual system of plants to appear in the English language. Moreover he was instrumental in introducing many exotic plants into cultivation in England, inter alia the *Fuchsia*. After his death—his partner having predeceased him—his son continued the nursery business. MASSON has also known the elder LEE.

[17] JOHN SIMS (1749–1831), botanist and physician, edited CURTIS'S Botanical Magazine from 1801–1826 (vols. xiv–xlii) and from 1805–1807, in conjunction with KONIG, the Annals of Botany.

CHARLES DIETRICH EBERHARD KONIG (orig. KÖNIG) (1774–1851) was a German mineralogist, who came to England to arrange the collections of Queen CHARLOTTE at the end of 1800. Later he became assistant to DRYANDER, librarian to BANKS. In 1807 he succeeded Dr. SHAW as assistant keeper of the department of natural history in the British Museum.

[18] MACOWAN, *Personalia of Botan. Collectors at the Cape*, re-published by VERDUYN DEN BOER in Botanists at the Cape I, p. 40 (1929).

FRANCIS MASSON TO LINNAEUS AND LINNAEUS FILIUS[19]

FIRST LETTER TO LINNAEUS

London, Dec. 26, 1775.

Honourable Sir,

I hope your goodness will excuse the liberty I have taken in addressing myself to you, as it proceeds from a knowledge of your superior merit, and your exalted character in natural history. I have been employed some years past, by the King of Great Britain, in collecting of plants for the Royal Gardens at Kew. My researches have been chiefly at the Cape of Good Hope, where I had the fortune to meet with the ingenious Dr. Thunberg, with whom I made two successful journeys into the interior parts of the country. My labours have been crowned with success, having added upwards of 400 new species to his Majesty's collection of living plants, and I believe many new genera.

I expect soon to go out on another expedition, to another part of the globe, to collect plants for his Majesty. If I should be so fortunate as to discover any thing new in any branch of natural history, I should be happy in having the honour of communicating it to you. I had the pleasure of seeing Mr. Sparrmann at the Cape, and received from him a parcel of seeds, which he collected in the Southern Islands, and which I now send to you. I could not presume to send you any Cape plants, as I suppose Dr. Thunberg has sent you every kind that he collected, which are much the same as mine. I also intended sending you a collection of the St. Helena plants; but that I shall defer until your ports are open for shipping.

The inclosed specimen I think is a new genus, to which my worthy friend Mr. Thunberg had a great desire of giving the name of *Massonia*, honouring me with this mark of his friendship. But notwithstanding the good will of Dr. Thunberg and many other botanical friends, I have declined receiving that honour from any other authority than the great Linnaeus, whom I look upon as the father of botany and natural history, in hopes that you will give it your sanction. I am sorry that the leaves are not more perfect; but it is the only specimen I have [Pl. XXXVII]. I shall take the liberty to give a description of the root and leaves; the flowers being perfect, I refer them to your better judgment.

Radix bulbosa, tunicata, subglobosa, diametro sesquiunciali.

Folia duo, radicalia, ovata, subrotunda, acuminata, glabra, laevia, carnosa, nervosa, nervis immersis, palmaria, adspersa maculis numerosis purpurascentibus.

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[19] Selected pages—*Smith—Linnaeus's Correspondence,* Vol. II, 1821, pp. 559–565. These letters do not show any spelling-mistakes, they must have been corrected before they were printed.

Scapus brevissimus, sinubus foliorum quasi immersus, teres, glaber. Habitat in campis elevatis in regione Rogeveld.[20]

I have seen another species with narrow leaves, which flowered in Kew garden. This I shall send you by next opportunity. I shall add no more, but am, with great esteem, your most obedient, humble servant,

Francis Masson

SECOND LETTER TO LINNAEUS

Madeira, Aug. 6, 1776.

Honourable Sir,

I had the pleasure of receiving yours on the 19th of May, on which day I left England. This prevented my writing you an answer; nevertheless, I left orders with Mr. Lee [the elder] to send you a specimen of the *Massonia angustifolia*, with an engraving of both species; also several other dry plants, which I thought were new genera. I am glad of the intelligence concerning the *Massonia*. I was so weak a botanist as to think its fruit, being a capsule, would entirely separate it from the genus *Haemanthus*; but I beg leave to offer an argument in favour of my former opinion; which is, that the aforesaid plant has *germen superum*, whereas *Haemanthus* has *germen inferum*.[21] Your good nature and generosity, in acquiescing to confer the honour of a genus on so young a botanist as I am, deserve my most grateful thanks.

I have observed many new plants here, especially trees, which I think are new genera, but have not seen their fructification perfect. I have noticed that most of the Syngenesious plants[22] are of the first subdivision, *Corollis ligulatis*,[23] which to me are a little difficult, having found several shrubby plants which I can refer to no genus but *Sonchus* [Comp.], which is very uncommon. I have observed that all the rare plants grow either on the high cliffs near the sea, or in horrible deep chasms, that run towards the middle of the island. But towards the top, which is more than 5000 geometrical feet perpendicular, I have found nothing but a few European plants, especially *Spartium scoparium*.[24] I have taken the freedom to send you a few plants, which I should be glad to know your opinion of, there being many which I could not determine.

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[20] *Root* bulbous, tunicated, subglobose, one and a half inches in diam.; *leaves* two, radical, ovate, roundish, narrowed near the top into a little point, glabrous, thin, fleshy, nervose, with immersed nerves, the size of a hand, strewn with numerous purplish dots; *stem* very short, as if sunk in the folds of the leaves, terete, glabrous. Habitat: in high veld in the Roggeveld region.

[21] *Germen superum* and *germen inferum:* ovary superior and ovary inferior.

[22] With stamens having the anthers united, but filaments free.

[23] *Corollae ligulatae:* strap-shaped corollae, as in the ray-flowers of Compositae.

[24] Spartium scoparium, L. (Leguminosae), now known under the name *Cytisus scoparius*, Link, is the common or Scotch broom, widely spread over Europe.

I have sent you a plant under the name of *Aitonia rupestris*[25] of Forster's *Genera Plantarum*, which he discovered at Madeira, and named it in honour of William Aiton, his Majesty's botanical gardener at Kew. But if the said gentleman deserved that honour, I think Forster did him great injustice, to give an ingenious gardener a plant which can never be introduced into Europe, and consequently its existence will still be doubted. I know Mr. Aiton has no ambition for that honour; but still, for the respect I have for so ingenious a gardener, I took the liberty to give No. 19* that name, thinking it a new genus, and a plant which will soon be introduced into the European gardens; but this matter I must submit to your better judgment. I shall now conclude with imploring the Divine Being to grant you still a longer existence on earth, to patronize the great study of the works of Nature; which is the earnest wish of, Sir, your most obliged, humble servant, Francis Masson.

* This was no other than *Campanula aurea. Linn. Suppl.* 141.—Note by SMITH who refers to LINNAEUS *fil., Suppl. Plantarum*, 1781.

LETTER TO LINNAEUS FILIUS

Sir, Madeira, Dec. 12, 1778.

In June last I was honoured with your long-desired epistle, dated December 1777. Being at that time in the Canaries, I had no opportunity of acknowledging the favour; but now being again arrived in the island of Madeira, I have taken the earliest opportunity of acknowledging how much I am indebted to you for your civility.

I condole with you on the death of your great father; a loss which every lover of arts and sciences must ever feel.

I am sorry that the small parcel of specimens which I sent was damaged in the passage; but am happy to know a better way of conveyance than by London. The hurry and confusion, peculiar to great cities, will account for the difficulty of obtaining such objects. I humbly thank you for the names of those that were perfect, but cannot help offering my opinion concerning the *Echium* (*candicans*) and *Digitalis* (*Sceptrum*).[26] The first is a very large shrub, having spikes of blue flowers near two feet long at the extremities of the branches, which make a glorious experience when in bloom. I think the *Echium argenteum*,[27] from the Cape of Good Hope, is far from being so fine a plant. I think also the *Digitalis* differs from the *canariense*, in size of the shrub, mode of flowering, and figure of the corolla. I am sorry it is not in my power to renew the specimens of those which were lost, having sent all the Madeira collection to England. But as the Canary collection still remains in my possession, I have sent a few seeds and specimens, which I hope you will receive in better order.

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[25] This Madeira plant has nothing to do with the Cape genus of that name, Aitonia, Thunb., with A. capensis, Thunb. as sole species, originally classified with the Sapindaceae. Later it was re-named *Nymania capensis*, (Thunb.) Lindb. and classified with the Meliaceae. The species owes its common names "Chinese Lanterns" and "Klapperbos" to its curious bladdery capsules of a bright rosy colour.

In the Linnean Society's custody there is a Latin diagnosis of "Aitonia rupestris", covering 2 pp. 4to, taken from FORSTER's *Genera Plantarum*, in MASSON's handwriting and signed "F. Masson". In a note regarding this little document it is stated to be an enclosure to MASSON's letter of August 6, 1776 to LINNAEUS, but this is in contradiction with a little note of MASSON's following the diagnosis and which reads: "N.B. Send this description along with the Plant. adieu, F. Masson." FORSTER's plant is characterized by lanceolate, bi-serrate leaves and flowers in a panicle.

[26] *Echium candicans*, L. (Boraginaceae), from Madeira, and Digitalis Sceptrum, L. = *Isoplexis sceptrum*, Steud. (Scrophulariaceae), a native of the Canaries.

Respecting the Physicians and Botanists in Portugal, I have not the honour of being acquainted with any of them. But since my residence here I have contracted a correspondence with Mr. De Visme, a merchant in Lisbon, who has a fine botanic garden, and is an enthusiastic lover of plants. By his last letter he informed me that the Queen of Portugal had sent several young botanists (students of Vandelli[28]) to their settlements of Angola and Brazil to explore these rich countries. But I have a poor opinion of the genius of the Portuguese for such researches. I have now finished my peregrinations among the Fortunate Islands,[29] and have found great pleasure, as well in the novelty of their productions as the singularity of the country. Madeira consists of tremendous broken precipices, covered with the most luxuriant evergreens. The woods are shady and moist, abounding with the most curious species of *Filices* and *Musci*. The Azores are remarkable for abundance of hot springs and other vestiges of volcanos; but their natural productions come nearer to those of Europe. The Canaries, remarkable for the enormous height of the land, abound with rare plants, which nearly approach the productions of Africa. I have made no collections of animals in these islands. The birds are but few, and those well known in Europe. Of insects and shells I have seen none worthy of observation. I now wait for a passage to the West Indies; but the present war, in which my country is involved,[30] will, I fear, render my voyage less extensive than I at first expected. I shall always esteem your correspondence the greatest honour, and cheerfully contribute my mite for the advancement of natural knowledge.

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[27] Echium argenteum, Berg., later re-named *Lobostemon argenteus*, (Berg.) Buek., found by THUNBERG at the Cape.

[28] DOMENICO (Port. DOMINGOS) VANDELLI, born in Padua in 1735, and died in Lisbon in 1816, came to settle in Portugal in 1764. He became a professor of natural history and chemistry at the University of Coimbra, and is the founder of the botanical garden of this university. He published various botanical works, inter alia on the Portugal and the Brazil flora.

[29] By the Fortunate Islands MASSON designates the Canaries and Madeira, and, as may be gathered from his letter, also the Azores. The name "Fortunate Islands" (Isles of the Blest, the abode of the extremely happy) was originally applied by the Greeks to mythical islands in the Western Atlantic. When the Canary Islands were discovered, the name was attached to them.

[30] In 1778 England was at war with France and Spain.

PLATE XXXVI.

FRANCIS MASSON

After an oil-painting at the Linnean Society of London.

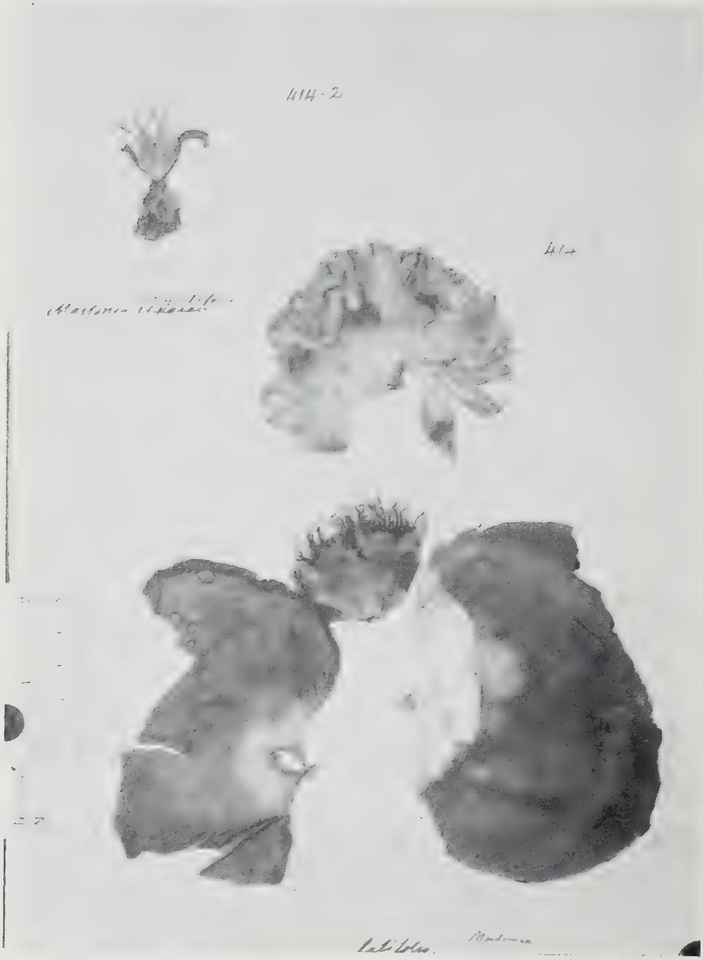

PLATE XXXVII.

The "Massoniae" in the Herbarium of Linnaeus. *Massonia latifolia*, L. f. and, in the top corner, *Polyxena angustifolia*, Baker (syn. M. angustifolia, L. f.).

The Linnean Society of London.

I long to hear the fate of Mr. Thunberg, with whom I had the honour to be acquainted at the Cape, we having together made two long journeys into the interior parts of that country, *in which time I profited much by his extensive knowledge in the history of Nature.*[31] Inclosed is a list of the specimens, with some local observations. I have the honour to be, with all possible respect, your most obedient, humble servant,

Francis Masson.

The Linnean Society's collection of manuscripts includes a list of plants and seeds from the Canaries (and Madeira) under the title "Plantae Canarienses", in MASSON's handwriting, sent to Uppsala, which beyond doubt is the enclosure referred to in the above letter to the younger LINNAEUS. Several of those plants were published in *Supplementum Plantarum* (1781), with MASSON quoted as the collector. LINNAEUS *filius* has corrected and added the binominals. The list covers two 4to sheets, each showing the name "Carl von Linné", written at the bottom in MASSON's handwriting. The list numbers 61 plants and seeds; under the listed seeds we found one Cape plant, viz., "51. Massonia latifolia ex C. B. S."

There are only two specimens—on separate sheets—under the name *Massonia* in the herbarium of LINNAEUS, viz., *M. latifolia* and *M. angustifolia.* On the *latifolia* sheet the genus name has been written by the elder LINNAEUS, while LINNAEUS *fil.* has added the name of the species. It is interesting to notice on the latter sheet that LINN. *fil.* started to write a different specific name, but crossed it out before having finished it.

The photographs of the two specimens, for which we are indebted to the Linnean Society, had to be joined into one illustration (see Plate XXXVII), the utter smallness of the one specimen rendering a separate reproduction less feasible.

There is not the slightest doubt about it that the specimen of *M. latifolia* is the very same plant MASSON sent to LINNAEUS, enclosed with his letter of Dec. 26, 1775. MASSON apologizes in his letter for the imperfection of the leaves: the specimen in the herbarium shows damaged leaves. And then there is the reference to the *M.* specimen in the herbarium of LINNAEUS in SMITH's biography of MASSON in *Rees's Cyclopaedia*, which speaks for itself. The short Latin description MASSON gives of this plant (probably made up by one of his London friends) in his letter to LINNAEUS, matches the description of *M. latifolia*, L. f. in *Rees's Cycl.* and also in the *Flora Capensis.*

M. latifolia, the species on which the gen. *Massonia* was founded (Thunb. ex Linn. fil. Suppl. pp. 27 et 193), was discovered by THUNBERG

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[31] The italics are ours.

(possibly also by Masson who was Thunberg's companion on that journey) in the Roggeveld region of the central Cape in 1774, and introduced into cultivation at Kew by Masson in 1775. The species of *Massonia*, an endemic Cape genus belonging to the Liliaceae, are characterized by fragrant hyacinthoid flowers, arising in a sessile or subsessile globose head from between two broad prostrate leaves. In most of the species the perianth is whitish like in the type species *M. latifolia.* The inflorescence is surrounded by a whorl of bracts (involucre). The number of species known is now 45; they are mainly found in the central district, but are also recorded from Namaqualand to the Uitenhage and Albany districts. This is a genus of attractive little plants. They may not be showy like so many others of the Liliaceae family, but they definitely belong to the more precious gems of our wonderful Cape flora.

It is a pity that the *latifolia* specimen in the herbarium of Linnaeus is rather poor. The right-hand leaf, less damaged than the other one, is just over 4 inches broad; the leaf being incomplete, the length cannot be measured. The ovate leaves of this species can grow 6—10 inches long. Both the outer and inner bracts of the involucre are shown.

Now we come to the tiny specimen in the top corner of the illustration. Originally named M. angustifolia by the younger Linnaeus (*Suppl.* p. 193), the species was later separated from the gen. *Massonia* and included in the gen. *Polyxena*, Kunth,[32] as *P. angustifolia* by Baker. This genus differs from *Massonia*, inter alia by the inflorescence being a loose corymb, the bracts not arranged in an involucre, and the erect, usually narrow leaves. The perianth is white in most species, but there are also with lilac or mauve flowers like the type species *P. pygmaea*, Kunth (Massonia ensifolia, Ker; Polyanthes pygmaea, Jacq.). Also this genus is endemic in the Cape. It now comprises 10 species, mainly found in the central district, but also in Namaqualand and in the Worcester, Uniondale and Uitenhage districts. *P. angustifolia*, Baker, has white flowers which are very fragrant. It was found by Thunberg on the summit of a mountain, in the Onderste Roggeveld (Lower —), in 1774, and introduced into cultivation by Masson in the following year. We may safely assume that the specimen in Linnaeus's herbarium is the same as the one referred to in Masson's letters to Linnaeus of Dec. 27, 1775, and Aug. 6, 1776. Engravings of this species (under the name M. angustifolia) and of *M. latifolia* were published in Aiton's *Hortus Kewensis*, i, p. 405, tab. 4 (1789); cf. Smith in his article in *Rees's Cyclopaedia.*

The herbarium specimen of *Polyxena angustifolia* (photographed on a somewhat larger scale than the other plant) shows the inflorescence complete with bracts between the rests of the two leaves. However, there is enough left of the leaves to show that they are erect and narrow. In the description of this small liliaceous plant in the *Flora Capensis*, the leaves are stated to be 6 inches long and 1—1½ inches broad above the middle; the shape is described as oblong-spathulate.

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[32] C. S. Kunth, *Enumeratio Plantarum*, etc., vol. 4, p. 294 (1843).

THE YOUNGER JAMES LEE TO JAMES EDWARD SMITH[33]

There are two letters (autographs), written at Hammersmith. The first and shorter one, of March 11, 1806, written also on behalf of Lee's business associate ("for Self & Co"), may be quoted here as far as it deals with Masson. After a bit of information (obviously asked for), inter alia that they cannot procure any Fuchsia seed, the writer gives ample expression of their esteem for Smith's abilities as a scientist. Then, turning to Masson, Lee writes: "We are sorry to have to communicate to you the death of our dear Friend Masson who died at Montreal in Jan^{y} last,[34] we lament his fate most sincerely, he was hard dealt by, in being exposed to the bitter cold of Canada in the decline of life, after twenty five years Services in the Hot Climates, and all for a pittance—he has done much for Botany and Science, and deserves to have some lasting memorial given of his extreme modesty, good temper, generosity, and usefullness. We hope when opportunity serves you will be his Champion."

The second letter which is nearly entirely devoted to Masson and which is the one Smith has quoted from in his article, may be reproduced here in full.

Hammersmith, 9 July 1812.

D^{r} Sir

I received y. kind letter of the 12th May with a packet of seeds from Russia for which accept our best thanks—I have also received Ys. of the 22 June concerning the particulars of the life of Mr. Masson—I mentioned to you that I thought he had been ill used, and ill paid, considering what he had done for his Majesty's Gardens, and for the Science of Botany in general—he explored the Cape of Good Hope twice, Madeira, the Canaries, Azores, Spain, Gibraltar, Tangier, Minorca, Majorca, the West Indies, and Canada—I thought I could have procured the particulars of his life from his Nephews, who inherited his property, but it proves to be only the journals of his various travels thro the above countries, the reason of my delay in answering yours is the continued number of people who are night and day here to see our Collection of Roses, which are now in flower, walking round and round from six in the morning till ten at night, leaves us quite exhausted, but that should not have prevented me so much as my papers were all packed up as our house is painting, I have Searched in Vain, as I cannot find any document of Masson's life or any memorandum concerning him—One of his Nephews who had his journals is dead, after spending all the money he divided with the other Nephew, I waited therefore some time till I could get the journals (as I thought his life) which were somewhere on account of distress. I have bought Masson's Canada Specimens of him as I had his others—Masson was of a mild temper, persevering in his pursuits even to a great enthusiasm, of great industry which his Specimens, and drawings of Fish, Animals, Insects, plants, and Views of the Countries he passed thro evince, and tho he passed a solitary life in distant Countries from Society his love of natural history never forsook him, characters like him seem for the present dwindling in the world, but I trust they will revive— —I cannot add more as I have several people waiting and I could add nothing to what I have said by delay. I therefore trust you will forgive me for the delay in answering y. letter—

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[33] Selected folios.—*Scientific Correspondence of Sir J. E. Smith.* Vol. 6, K–L.

[34] Most authors give 1805 (late in December, abt. Christmas) as the year of his death.

I am D^{r} Sir with great respect
Y. much obliged Ser$^{t.}$
James Lee

P.S. I cannot recollect the particulars of what Konig and Sims have said, and I have not the Annals of Botany by me. If a work would sell of Memoranda Massoniana there is matter enough to carry it to great extent.

Addressed to: J. E. Smith
Norwich

PORTRAIT OF FRANCIS MASSON. The three-quarter length portrait reproduced herewith (Plate XXXVI), which hangs on the wall of the main staircase in Burlington House, the seat of the Linnean Society of London, is, according to BRITTEN,[35] undoubtedly the very same that was at one time in the possession of JAMES LEE: it was bought from a general dealer at Hounslow in 1884 by Mr. W. CARRUTHERS, who presented it to the Linnean Society. MASSON is shown with a background of cliff: on the left is a view of Table Bay viewed from the north; Devil's Peak, Table Mountain, and Signal Hill are readily distinguishable. The artist is unknown.

(*To be continued*)

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[35] J. BRITTEN, *Some Early Cape Botan. and Coll.*, in Journ. Linn. Soc.—Botany, Vol. xlv (1920–22), p. 43.